

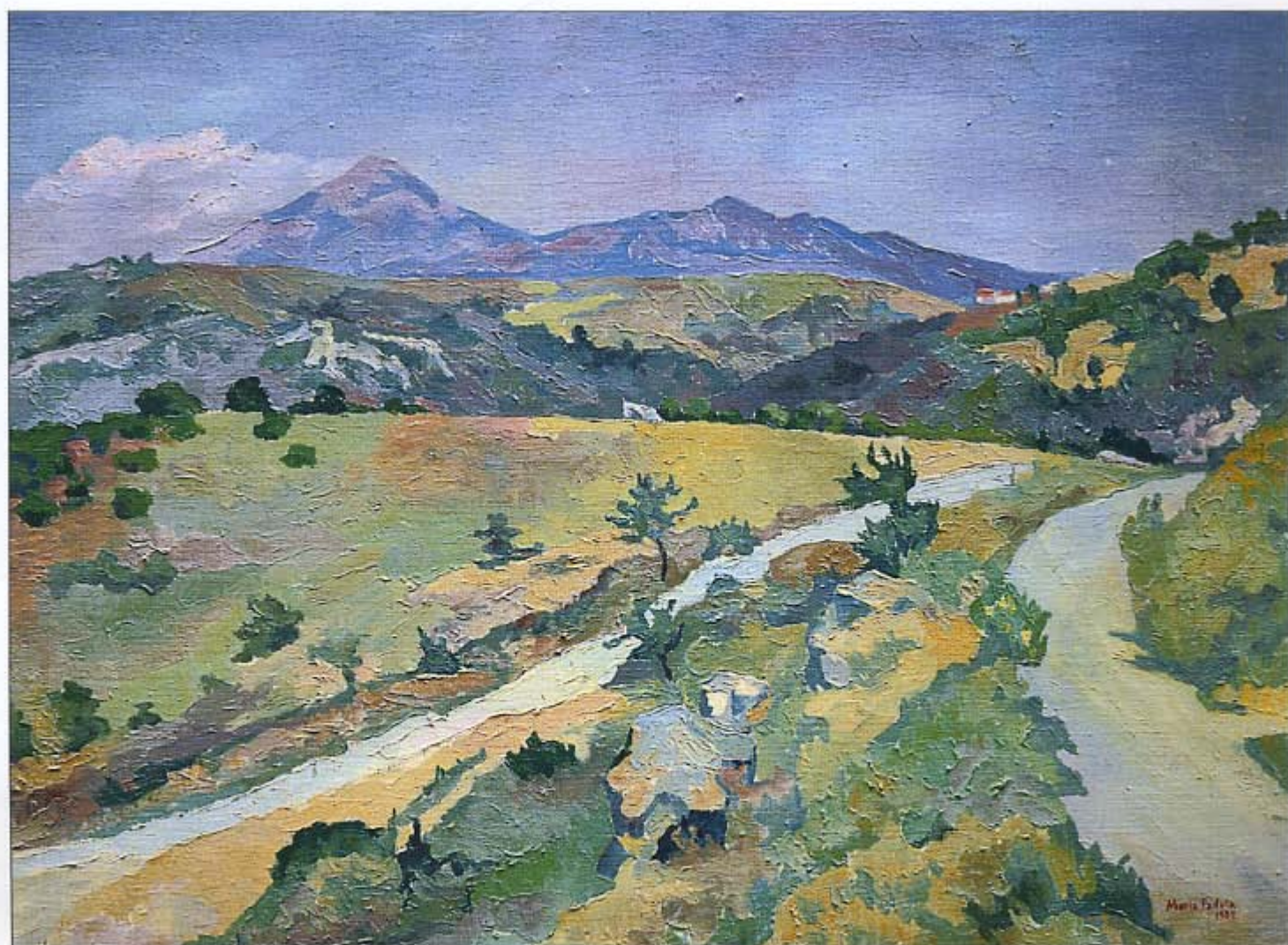
THE ANDRÉS SEGOVIA ARCHIVE

GENERAL EDITOR: ANGELO GILARDINO

Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo

DUE CANZONI ITALIANE

per chitarra



front cover:

Maria Padula (1915-1987)

“LA MIA TERRA” (1962)

(*“MY LAND”*)

oil on canvas - cm. 60 x 80

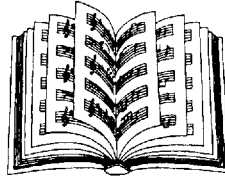
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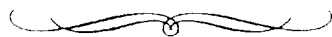
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FOREWORD



ELSA OLIVIERI SANGIACOMO (1894-1996)

«*Segovia, what a revelation! Never before had we heard anyone draw such great sounds and emotions from a guitar. Sheer transcendental virtuosity and intimate spirituality. At times it sounded like a harpsichord, others like a lute, and at other times again like a harp: a soft and ethereal, tone-coloured Aeolian harp. Both Ottorino and I became right away very close friends with Segovia. Whenever he came to see us it was an opportunity to entertain enjoyable conversations, especially for myself, so fond as I was of speaking Spanish.*» This is how Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo recalls hers, and her husband's and teacher's very first encounter with the great Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia (1893-1987), a meeting which in all likelihood took place on the occasion of Segovia's first concert at the Academy of Saint Cecilia. It was the beginning of a friendship destined to last a lifetime.

It is not at all surprising to find out that Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo, when she resumed composing again after the long interruption due to her marriage to Ottorino Respighi (to whom she devoted herself entirely until his passing away and well beyond), composed – besides other scores – *Due canzoni italiane* (“Two Italian songs”) for guitar, dedicating them to the greatest virtuoso of all times, Andrés Segovia. Yet we find no mention whatsoever of these two scores in either her diaries or in her books

of memoirs, especially in *Cinquant'anni di vita nella musica* (“Fifty years of my life devoted to music”), where Andrés Segovia's name comes up time and again. It surfaces in her description of Segovia's first concert at Saint Cecilia, as mentioned above, but also when describing one of her «usual visits to Siena» in the summer of 1940. It was on that occasion our composer met artists «who were very dear, like Guarnieri, Celibidache, Serato, Enesco, Navarra, Cortot, Segovia and the harpist Ada Sassoli Ruata.» She was to meet most of them again «after the long pause of the great war», when she met with «Charles Münch, Furtwängler, Cortot, Segovia, Menuhin, Barbirolli» and many others yet. The two compositions recently brought to light by Angelo Gilardino date back to that period and it is not by accident that they were dated «December 1948».

I stated just above that Elsa loved to speak Spanish and that was an ostensible reason for her amiable conversations with Andrés Segovia. It was from her Mexican mother (Maria Canobbio Tamés) she got her outstanding command of that language. Maria in her turn was descended from a very ancient Aztec family which has long since died out. Elsa's mother exerted a great deal of influence in her daughter's life. On the one hand she taught her the language that inspired in our composer some of her most beautiful pieces, such as the *Tre canzoni spagnole* (“Three Spanish songs”); on the other she also taught her the basics of guitar playing. Elsa Respighi wrote: «To please dad,

mommy started learning how to play the guitar and before long she could accompany the songs I sang alone or in a duo, along with dad.» This happened between 1900 and 1902, when Elsa lived in Florence with her mom and dad. The latter was an officer in the Piedmontese army; he was stationed in Tuscany's main town. So, the guitar was a familiar musical instrument in Elsa's life ever since she was a child.

Elsa wrote: «Mom's musical input proved very precious when we found ourselves confined for many months in the village of Lucera, in Apulia, where we could have no piano. Our only joy was to discover the most fascinating songs of that land and make them our own, harmonizing them in a rudimentary way.» Later, the songs Elsa had thus collected – when yet so young – inspired Ottorino Respighi too, who drew from them the main theme for *Ottobrata* from *Feste romane* (“Roman holidays”) and the renowned serenade, the lead part of which is entrusted to the mandolin.

As for the guitar score presented here, I would like to speak now about its possible origin. To begin with, it is useful to know more about some sources Elsa frequently spoke about. There is little likelihood they will be available in the near future. They consist of countless masterpieces from our invaluable artistic heritage which an experienced researcher like Mrs. Olivieri had in part selected for her maestro in preparation for a grand singing and dancing spectacle in which to display all of the Italian folklore. With much care and wisdom Elsa had selected all the materials needed for such a major undertaking.

Mr. Hurock, the producer behind the extraordinary success of Djagilev's Russian ballets, asked her to personally look after their staging and, thus, to artistically sever herself from Ottorino Respighi. And that is the reason why the whole project fell through. After the maestro's death, Elsa threw herself body and soul into musical projects once more and the folkloric endeavour came to life again, at least as far as Elsa's aspirations went, as can be inferred from her own notes reported in various writings.

Some of them deal with the main sources. As far as Sicily goes, we find the *Canti della Sicilia* (“Songs from Sicily”) edited by F.P. Frontini (published by Forlivesi, Florence, 1898) and the most charming *Canti della terra e del mare di Sicilia* (“Songs from the land and sea of Sicily”) edited by A. Favara (published by Ricordi). Then we find *Varie danze italiane* (“Various Italian dances”) published by Ricordi and edited by O. Chilesotti, but also some Venetian songs reworked by Elsa and Ottorino to create a picture evidently drawing inspiration from Longhi's and Guardi's landscapes.

Later, we come across songs from the Roman countryside, not to underplay the merely visual effect of the show, much like what one would find in Pinelli's engravings. Another picture from the theme “love and hatred” was conceived for the island of Sardinia, for which they could count on Ennio Porrino's ideal cooperation (Porrino was one of Respighi's pupils and a typical representative of that island's musical heritage). A lot of room in this show had been set aside for the regions of Abruzzo and Molise, due to the imposing number of songs collected under the label *Eco di Napoli* (“Echoes from Naples”). Some of these songs, found among the maestro's holograph papers – like the *Canzone sarda* (“Sardinian song”), 1928; and *Tutte le fontanelle* (“All of the little fountains”), 1930 – are now listed in the *Catalogo delle opere di Ottorino Respighi* (“Catalogue of Ottorino Respighi's works”). Needless to say these titles only partially cover the entire original program for the show since we find here but a few of Italy's regions.

WHO WAS ELSA OLIVIERI SANGIACOMO ?

She was the daughter of Arturo Olivieri Sangiacomo (1861-1903) – also frequently referred to in news reports from those days as the “captain-novelist” owing to his active service in the Piedmontese army – and

to Maria Canobbio Tamés (1875-1978), a Mexican girl by many a year a junior to her husband and a descendant of an ancient Aztec family. The personage of Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo cannot be easily defined owing to the diverse and numerous facets of her artistic personality. She was a musician, a singer, a theatre director, a writer (signing herself with her husband's family name) and much more besides. One cannot fail to notice all of these activities have music as their common denominator.

It was Elsa's father who first realised the child had an outstanding musical bent and encouraged her to undertake a career in piano performance. It was the very first months of 1900 and the Olivieri Sangiacomo family lived in Florence. Shortly thereafter they moved once again to Rome.

In 1903 Elsa began studying piano under the guidance of Clotilde Poce, the beloved pupil of Giovanni Sgambati. Two years later Elsa enrolled in the *Istituto nazionale di musica* ("National institute for music"), where Mrs. Poce was a full professor. In 1907 Pietro Mascagni became the new director of the school and enthusiastically declared: «*This child will be much talked about !*»

In 1909 Elsa entered for admission to the piano course at the Santa Cecilia conservatory of music, where she was assigned to an honours' piano course. Among the members of the examining board was Giovanni Sgambati, who considered her a talented student and offered her some free piano lessons. This went on for more than two years. They turned out to be «*unforgettable lessons, perfect as far as style, technique and interpretation went*». Sgambati coached her for her debut at the Russian embassy where, under the auspices of Petr Ilich Čajkovskij's brother (then a minister of state) "first class concerts" were organised. The debut, however, never took place. A few days before the appointed event, an attack of acute neuritis to her right forearm put an end to Elsa's piano career, causing her a psychological trauma. It

was the year 1911. That tragedy was to forcibly lead her to her destiny, and without it she would have never have become the pupil and then the wife of Ottorino Respighi. In 1912 Elsa enrolled in the harmony, fugue and composition courses, subjects which she studied side by side with singing.

In more than one way, 1913 was the year Ottorino Respighi entered her life. On January 15th Respighi began teaching at Santa Cecilia. By then Elsa attended the third year of the harmony course taught by maestro Renzi. On that day, when the class was over, Elsa waited on the class' threshold to catch a glimpse of the new teacher. This is how Elsa relates that event: «*Finally the door opened and there came Respighi with his pupils: Traversi, Carnevali, Cimarosa, Di Donato, who surrounded him and looked as though they wanted to stand even closer to him... Meantime I thought with a bit of sadness it would take yet many years before I would attend his classes ! ... I felt a great leap of joy in my heart and embracing a girl class-mate I told her "I have fallen in love with maestro Respighi".*» The face-to-face encounter with the maestro took place in October 1915, when Elsa enrolled in the fugue and composition course, the one taught by Respighi.

Among the latter's various recollections as a teacher, one concerns Elsa directly. One day, unable to go any further with a quartet she had been assigned, she decided to hand in instead a lyrical song on a Spanish text which she had composed a few months earlier, though she felt sure the maestro would disapprove of it. Surprisingly enough, at the end of the audition he exclaimed: «*This, young lady, is surely your path; you must go on composing this way.*» And that was not all.

Later on, after listening to two more lyrical songs making up a group of *Tre canzoni* ("Three songs"), sung by Elsa herself, he praised them a lot and, when he later travelled to Milan, he took them to the publisher Ricordi, who shortly thereafter published them. The *Tre canzoni* were performed for the first time on June 2nd

1917, at the second composition course's final recital in the Academic Hall in Via dei Greci.

But an unprecedented success was to be obtained by Elsa at the diploma recital in the following year, when – on May 26th 1918 – was performed on that same stage a *Serenata di maschere* (“A serenade of masks”), a symphonic poem under the direction of maestro Alessandro Bustini. A review of that recital appeared in the prestigious pages of *La tribuna* the day after, where an interesting article by Alberto Gasco was published. On this occasion also Respighi did not fail to promote his pupil by mailing his publisher press-cuttings about her new composition which had been performed «with resounding success owing to its most brilliant orchestration and devilish liveliness».

THE COMPOSER

And that is how Elsa's career as a composer began. And what a beginning it was, after all, at such a tender age, with no prior apprenticeship whatsoever. In that same year (1919) Elsa composed four short lyrical songs inspired by Omar Khayam's *Rubayat*. They were published by Ricordi in 1920. From that same year there are two French songs: *Je n'ai rien* (“I have nothing”) by Henry de Régnier and *Berceuse bretonne* (“Breton cradle song”) by Théodore Botrel. Style wise they resemble some of Jules Massenet's elegiac arias. These two lyrical songs met with an extraordinary success, above all in their performance by Victoria de Los Angeles.

The complete list of Olivieri's compositions includes symphonic and chamber works and suddenly breaks off in the early twenties. There followed a long period of silence. Total commitment to her husband and teacher: «*Ubi major, minor cessat*» (“Wherever a greater one steps in, the smaller vanishes”). That, at least, appears to be the interpretation of this excessively modest behaviour on the part of the young and yet already established composer.

THE MARRIAGE TO OTTORINO RESPIGHI

What happened? Simple enough: early in 1919 Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo married Ottorino Respighi. A few months earlier, in the wake of the success obtained by his pupil at the composition recital, Respighi had candidly admitted falling in love with her and a few days later had asked her to marry him. The maestro however wished her young companion to go on composing even after their marriage. When the musician went to Santa Cecilia to impart his lessons, as usual, Elsa would resume her work. This is how Elsa relates the situation: «*In the afternoon the maestro always stayed home, and I could not even think of interfering with his work or his reading and so I postponed my intention to “work” to the day we would have another accommodation.*»

But her devotion to her husband was such that for eighteen years, and in spite of their moving to the villa “I pini”, Elsa did not jot down a single musical note until after the passing away of her husband. Her creativity was fully satisfied by her loving care for her husband, trying to be to him an inspirer. A concrete example of this is supplied by *Momento*, one of the “Three songs on Spanish lyrics”, which surfaces in one of Respighi's works. A few years ago Elsa told me in confidence her husband had requested from her the theme of the second Spanish song «*and he made of it the “Primo interludio” (“First interlude”) of his “Maria Egiziaca”: that will be the only page of my music which will live on after me*», commented Elsa later on.

THE SINGER AND THE PERFORMER

Perhaps the best Elsa could offer during her prolonged absence from composing was her singing. Who could have ever predicted that from the day of her marriage the former pianist and composer would turn into the “beloved

spokeswoman” of her husband’s vocal chamber music ? Soon in fact would the cooperation between Ottorino Respighi and Chiarina Fino-Savio (who was counted among the very first lieder-singers of Italy’s renewed interest in chamber music) gradually fade away and the performances with the maestro accompanying his singing wife on the piano become a tradition. The cooperation between Respighi and singer Fino-Savio had started in 1911; Respighi’s lyrical strain as a composer owed a lot to her vocal and expressive resources. Yet Elsa’s voice too must have possessed qualities which went way beyond sheer power, in spite of him jokingly styling her a «*little voice*». Small, maybe, if compared to the great singing performers of those days, but so well poised as to reach and charm even the most discriminating listeners.

As Elsa herself told me repeatedly, at the beginning hers was a beautiful and fully extended mezzo-soprano voice, «*reaching at most the higher notes of a dramatic soprano’s range (a B natural), which soon mellowed down to an F sharp or, at times, to a G natural*». She could expect little from a career as an opera singer at a time when mezzo-sopranos were sprouting like mushrooms everywhere. She had studied singing just as a pleasing pastime. Yet Elsa had the good luck of being from 1912 to 1916 a pupil of Madame Pettignani, herself a follower of the school of Virginia Boccabadati (1828-1922). Such expert schooling, along with a considerable store of ideas Elsa already had, helped her to complete her singing training in a short period of time and with much success. Once she got the hang of it, she put singing on the back burner for a while, to complete her musical studies, composition first and foremost. It was only after her marriage she resumed singing, refining a wide repertoire which included scores from as early as the fifteen and sixteen hundreds and went all the way to Respighi’s nineteen hundreds’ lyricism, without ever sidestepping songs from the popular folklore. To get an idea of the scope of her repertoire, it will suffice to finger through her collection of concert programs she performed

the world over along with her husband.

Elsa’s concert activity went on for a decade, from early 1921 (when she embarked on the Respighi-Corti-Olivieri Sangiacomo’s musical tour) until 1931, when Ottorino Respighi was appointed to the prestigious role of “national academician” and their concert activity came to a sudden halt. During this decade Elsa performed in well over three hundred concerts, usually accompanied on the piano by Respighi, with whom she also performed *Sensitiva* (“*The sensitive one*”) and *Tramonto* (“*Sunset*”). At times she was accompanied instead by some of the most famed orchestras and string quartets, her voice blending perfectly with the musical instruments owing to the split-second precision of her entries and the viola and cello overtones from her mezzo-soprano voice. It was towards the end of her singing activity that Elsa took part in the first ever performance of *Lauda per la natività* (“*Nativity’s praise song*”) by Respighi, along with Laura Pasini and Alfredo Sernicoli. The performance took place in Siena under the composer’s baton in the “Micat in Vertice” hall on November 22nd 1930. After that decade her role was once more scaled down to that of her husband’s inspiring muse.

BACK TO COMPOSITION AGAIN

After Respighi passed away, Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo resumed composing music and completed also some of her late husband’s works. Among them the unfinished *Lucrezia* and the choreographic arrangement of the *Antiche arie e danze per liuto* (“*Ancient arias and dances for the lute*”) for a scenario by Claudio Guastalla. The best and warmest acknowledgement for having completed *Lucrezia* came from Victor De Sabata (the Scala theater’s artistic director): «*He had the whole work read and prepared*» – wrote Elsa Respighi – «*and when he saw me at the first rehearsal he told me: “Elsa, you know how thoroughly I am familiar with Respighi’s scores; well, in all*

fairness I can tell you I was unable to tell the pages written by you".»

Even more demurely she resumed her creative activity too, composing at first two new lyrical songs: *La mamma povera* ("The destitute mother", 1938), for which she wrote the lyrics as well, and *Cantare campagnolo* ("Singing the country way", 1939), picking up where she had left off and gradually aiming at more ambitious targets. Between the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939 Elsa started reworking *Le astuzie femminili* ("Women's ploys"), a comic opera by Domenico Cimarosa, a score which Respighi had recast for Djagilev's Russian ballets in the early twenties. After a handful of fleeting appearances, mostly in the ballet form, Respighi's work had been set aside. It was only through giving in to a request by Mario Labroca (then director of the "Maggio fiorentino") that Elsa agreed to provide some sort of "reworking" of this opera. It was in this guise that it was finally staged at the "La Pergola" theatre in Florence on May 5th 1939, under the direction of Mario Rossi.

From this same period we also have a composition entitled *Pianto della Madonna* ("The tears of the Virgin"), a laud for soloists, choir and orchestra on lyrics thought to be by Jacopone da Todi. Its debut performance came on the night of June 6th 1939, broadcast by the Italian national radio, starring Maria Caniglia and the national radio's orchestra conducted by Armando La Rosa Parodi. But it was only in the wake of a concert of modern choral music in Santa Cecilia on April 20th 1940, that the name of our composer was reported by the most accredited Italian music critics, who appreciated three of her compositions, of which they particularly praised the *Ballata delle rose* ("The rose ballad"), as well as the «prayer to the "Holy Virgin", a song permeated by a wistful gracefulness from verses by Poliziano».

We thus arrive at the period of her major works, ushered in by *Il dono degli Alcesti* ("The gift from the Alcestis"). It is in one act divided in three scenes which Claudio Guastalla took from

Euripides, without however ignoring altogether Ranieri de' Calzabigi's libretto for Gluck: a pithy and terse plot cleansed of any shallow and easy-going manner. It is a work utterly permeated by all the melancholy which had taken the upper hand in Elsa's life after the death of her husband. So much so that departing from other story lines inspired by Euripides, Olivieri's work offers no happy ending. Love, indeed, will prevail and bind the two spouses even after death, but to them the possibility of migrating back to this earthly life is forever foreclosed. As mentioned, this one-act work is spread over three movements linked by two evocative intermezzos performed by the choir: *La danza della vita* ("Life's dance") and *La danza della morte* ("Death's dance"). Thanks to *Il dono degli Alcesti*, Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo won the national contest organized in 1942 by the Italian association of authors and publishers (SIAE). This prize meant her opera would be performed in that season's program (1942/3) at the "Royal opera theatre" in Rome, under the direction of Tullio Serafin. The event was postponed because of the war and her opera was never again performed, but the successful outcome of that competition drove Olivieri to embark upon a new and tough undertaking and that was *Shusai, figlio del Cielo (Samurai)* ("Shusai, a son from Heaven, Samurai"), an opera in three acts and four scenes on a libretto by the devoted Guastalla. It is a historical tragedy by Takeda Izumo, a Japanese poet and playwright, of whom Corrado Pavolini had supervised the Italian version.

The details surrounding the inception of this opera are unknown. One can however glean hints from Elsa's diary which reveal a long period of planning and preparation. After summing up that year's frightful heritage of war and destruction (it was 1944, in the very midst of the war), Elsa commits a few wishes to her diary: «I wonder if in this year 1945 I'll have the chance of travelling to Mexico with mother as I so much desire? And I wonder too if I'll be able to first complete my opera "Shusai, a son from Heaven", on which I have now been working for two years with so much deter-

mination.» Later, on December 28th 1945: «...I am happy with my work and firmly convinced the third act of this opera, as it stands, could have been written only by a woman.» The job was done. From a letter exchange between Elsa Respighi and Franco Capuana we may glean news concerning contacts she had tried to establish with the Scala theatre: «I dropped a few lines to Oldani more than a week ago but I haven't yet received any answer. I'd like to know if the reading committee has issued any announcement and if I may send someone to fetch back the papers of my Samurai; this too I asked Oldani, but I got no answer.» In the early eighties Elsa got some proposals to stage her opera in Tokyo, but she would have none of it anymore, because by then she had long given up composing. As Alberto Cantù wrote, nowadays «we all but forget how Elsa too had been a first-rate composer herself» and «if only someone made up his mind to unearth them, these two operas could easily vouch for it and pay tribute to this wonderful person as she fully deserves.»

During a research conducted for a second edition of the *Catalogue of the complete works* of Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo we find a confirmation of Elsa's predilection for the theatrical genre. A new score for a ballet was found, entitled *Pelle d'asino* ("Donkey hide"), dated February 9th 1937. From the composer's point of view, between her two major works was to be placed *Caterina da Siena* (a cantata for soprano, mixed choir and orchestra). In all likelihood the composition of this score took a long time, so much so that in the absence of any other report, one could date it back to 1947/48. She had been spellbound by this subject ever since the renowned poet Gabriele D'Annunzio had promised to write a libretto for the music of maestro Respighi. It was to be called *La Vergine e la città* ("The Virgin and the city"). Elsa had studied St. Catherine's life and deeds down to the finest detail: «My God! This extraordinary woman drives me out of my wits...» she wrote in her diary on March 24th 1943. But until then Guastalla had not yet written a single word and Elsa, sad and displeased, entered these lines

in her diary on her birthday: «... he lets days and months slip by without even noticing how much this apathy of his hurts me.» Then she resolved: «Well, for sure, Caterina, as I envision it now, will materialize into a clear and uninhibited form.» Hence, perhaps, the idea of deriving a cantata from it with a most original structure entitled *Preghiera di S. Caterina* ("St. Catherine's prayer"). Of this smaller cantata (obtained from the first one) for soprano voice with an accompaniment of strings, piano, organ and harp, we know it was excellently performed at the "Angelicum" in Milan in May 1949, along with works by Barbara Giuranna and Andrée Rochat. The *Due canzoni italiane* ("Two Italian songs"), dedicated to Andrés Segovia, date from the same time.

Once she had achieved her youthful aspirations and attained this highest degree of fulfilment of herself, Elsa once again put her career on the back burner and devoted her life to enhancing, disclosing and bringing to their fullest value the works of her beloved maestro. Here are a few lines from Elsa's diary dated June 30th 1950: «I gave up my work, although it was the "raison d'être" of my entire life. I did so because I no longer feel like struggling to have my tiny voice heard, which in all likelihood isn't worth listening to, far, far away as it is from today's fashions and tastes.»

THE WRITER, THE THEATRE DIRECTOR, THE TALENT SCOUT

These notes cannot ignore other qualities which were Elsa Respighi's very own: she was also a writer, a theatre director and a scout of young talents. The first she inherited from her father, whom we briefly introduced as a writer and journalist for the Roman daily *La tribuna*, so fond of writing that in order to devote himself entirely to it he gave up his career in the army. The second she got from some early experiences and from her regular presence at all the stagings of her husband's works. The third issued solely from her unerring in-

stinct. In spite of having dedicated most of her life to writing notes on staves, in the early fifties Elsa Respighi gave up composition and took to writing prose and, to be sure, not just about musical matters. Soon her first book appeared: an essential and very well known biography of Ottorino Respighi, published by Ricordi in 1954. There were five subsequent editions of it and it was translated into several languages.

Late in 1957 Elsa Respighi had a second book published which had nothing at all to do with the world of music, although some characters in it are connected with that milieu: *Venti lettere a Mary Webs* ("Twenty letters to Mary Webs"). One fine evening in September 1955, Elsa was returning home earlier than usual after having been at the musical festival in Venice. She went to bed right away. She had been at the Lido to listen to Charles Trenet whom she had not liked in the least and she was still bored stiff. Once she had turned off the light she reminisced about the fluke encounter she had with Alma Mahler and Werfel who were also returning from Venice, where they had witnessed the death and attended the funeral of one of Mahler's daughters. Finding it difficult to fall asleep, she figured this recently disappeared person could become a character for a novel. She imagined – or merely dreamt – about the looks of this girl and daydreaming about her fate she wrote her twenty letters, one a day, thus bringing to life one of the most baffling female characters of our literature.

On the dust jacket of *Venti lettere a Mary Webs* one can read the advertisement for a new collection of short stories entitled *Vita con gli uomini* ("A life with men"). «Already completed» it says, and yet this volume came off the print only in 1976, in Rome, published by Trevi. I remember with what greedy eagerness I read this book barely off the printing press. It was a fanciful book in which each short story took the cue from real experiences and is told by the same people who witnessed those events. Let us take for instance *Pranzo al castello* ("Lunch at the castle"), the sixteenth fiction topping off this book, a sort of autobiographical short story

in which at the end of the lunch prof. Lucio (one of the fellow guests) reads prophecies from a crystal bowl. One guest at a time, the professor reads what is in store for each of them and then, totally exhausted from his prophesying, he collapses to the floor. Out of the nine table companions gathered by an inexplicable destiny around the same table, to lunch in that hall where no one had eaten over the last two hundred years, one person alone would survive: Elsa. One does not have to go far to recognize among the guests Arturo Sebastiano Luciani as prof. Lucio, Ottorino Respighi and his wife Elsa as Mr. and Mrs. Regrani, and marquis Piero Misciattelli as Lucianelli. One can also see through other characters like prince Gualtiero, countess Annina and their son Niccolò Piccolomini.

Afterwards our writer makes her return to the musical milieu with *Cinquant'anni di vita nella musica* ("Fifty years of my life devoted to music"), a book laden with memories and personal experiences. It is a sort of sequel to her husband's biography and covering the period after his death, but also a historical essay of a fifty-year period dense with musical shows and performances. She reviews each event with insight and, often, without reserve. Elsa Respighi's book covers the five decades between 1905 and 1955, that is from her enrolment at the "National institute for music" until the end of 1955, when entries in her diary suddenly fell into a frightful silence and did not resume until January 1963. Be as it may, at the beginning of her book the author offers a glimpse of her family life, from March 24th 1894 (the day she was born) until the year 1905. As befits a volume of this girth and length, matters concerning Respighi are but a side line.

With the approach of the centenary of her husband's birth, Elsa Respighi – along with Leonardo Bragaglia – wrote a long overdue book: *Il teatro di Respighi, opere, balli e balletti* ("Respighi's theatre, operas, dances and ballets"), published by Trevi in Rome (in 1978), a work for which her co-author acknowledges her «extraordinary professional engagement... and sense of self-denial». Needless to say Elsa

Olivieri Sangiacomo's literary activity by no means ends here. Musical essays, and in particular those devoted to Respighi, are to be found interspersed everywhere among her ordinary writings. At any rate we now go on to examine another of her facets: that of theatre director.

Elsa's great passion for theatre is well known and it asserted itself in her youngest age when she, wearing the uniform of a Red Cross nurse at the onset of the "great war", organized a small stage in the Leoniano hospital in Rome to entertain soldiers. Many friends contributed to the purchase of the necessary outfittings, while the stage materials were donated by Baron Kanzler, who got them from the small private theatre at his villa in Montecatini.

Then came the time of the great "Respighi's era", when both Respighi and Guastalla charged Elsa with the production and staging of their works. Elsa was on hand at every single performance of a new opera by her husband: «*It is I who has got what you gentlemen lack*», said she once getting a little out of hand while addressing the authors. They were inertly sprawling in two armchairs in the stalls and were wrong-footed by her assertiveness. «*Her interventions in the production of "La fiamma" ("The flame"), of "Campana sommersa" ("Underwater bell") and, above all, of "Lucrezia" and "Maria Egiziaca", were instrumental in playing down the garishness of some directors she just could not stomach.*»

Elsa was in touch with the greatest theatre directors of her time. A particularly productive encounter was the one with Adolph Appia, which took place at one of the wonderful evening receptions hosted by marquis Pietro Misciattelli. Yet the most influential acquaintance for Elsa was the one with Max Reinhardt and her beloved pupil Margherita Wallmann, to the latter of whom she owed her technical expertise. Exactly the same way as she invented herself as a writer, she also plunged headlong in theatre direction out of sheer need, to protect and enhance the maestro's works. Soon after

his death, in May, she went to Berlin where on June 7th *La fiamma* (one of his works) would be staged. Everything was fine with the orchestra, superbly looked after by conductor Karl Böhm. The problem began instead with the stage rehearsal. The director had understood nothing of the opera and – what was even worse – the Exarch's royal palace in Ravenna was to him an entirely unknown place.

Finally we could hardly pass silently over Elsa's unfailing flair for tracking down young talents. For instance, while directing *Astuzie femminili* ("Women's ploys"), she chanced upon a then totally unknown tenor: Ferruccio Tagliavini. One day in October 1938, Elsa was at her villa "I pini" when she got a call from Mario Labroca who wanted her to hear a young tenor whom he thought of entrusting with a part in the opera. Needless to say, Elsa went straightaway to Florence. Of course the tenor was entirely a novice but, listening to him, she was immediately mesmerized by the warmth of his voice. He lacked Gigli's power, but sounded quite like him as far as timbre, production and phrasing went. «*As far as I am concerned, he is truly all right.*», she said on the spot. And Labroca in return: «*But he has no experience on stage !*» – «*It doesn't matter, I'll coach him, with Mario Rossi conducting the orchestra.*» The opera was staged and it was the launching of a new tenor who was on the road to becoming one of our best ever, as it turned out.

Something similar to this happened back in 1951, when Elsa was summoned to the Opera theatre in Rome to pick the female leading singer for *La fiamma* ("The flame"). Two artists were proposed, whom she just could not approve of. Then, when she heard a beautiful voice from Spoleto, also totally lacking in opera experience, she demanded one month to get her ready for the stage and took it upon herself to make an outstanding performer out of her: she was Antonietta Stella.

And, again, early in the sixties, Elsa met Uto Ughi, not yet twenty, but already well known for his prodigious virtuosity on the violin. The

friendship between Elsa Respighi and Uto Ughi, based on mutual esteem and trust, grew so much and became so natural that, maybe for this reason alone, Elsa never commented on it in any of her writings. Whatever little I know comes from Elsa's own telling, but also from Uto Ughi, whom I met time and again at his concerts. A photo from one of their first encounters shows Elsa at the piano and Uto, standing at her left, all absorbed in listening to what she had to say about the score, quite probably the interpretative tips she had received from her husband. From that meeting we have but a few other photos and a performance of two very well known violin composi-

tions by Respighi, recorded for radio and TV. One of these photos appeared in the pages of a notorious Italian weekly magazine, but the offspring of the seeds Elsa had sown is budding even now, whenever the great violinist performs Ottorino Respighi's music.

Potito Pedarra

Milan, April 2005.

*To the memory of Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo,
on the 10th anniversary of her death.*



ELSA OLIVIERI SANGIACOMO

(photo by Ghitta Carelli)

courtesy of prof. Potito Pedarra - Milan (Italy)

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The discovery on May 8th 2001 – in Linares, at the Andrés Segovia foundation – of a guitar composition by Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo was no major surprise to me, even though no one, not even Potito Pedarra (this composer's most qualified scholar), knew anything about the existence of *Due canzoni italiane* ("Two Italian songs").

But I was considerably surprised eight years earlier, in 1993, when I chanced upon a yellowed pile of papers in the Mozzani archives, at the civic library in Cento, inside which there was an equally unknown guitar score by Ottorino Respighi (Olivieri Sangiacomo's illustrious husband). I was totally bewildered. That, indeed, was a surprise which disclosed how the guitar in Italy, well before Segovia's time, had already been seen in a completely new light by musicians at large.

As a matter of fact, if in the first decade of the nineteen hundreds a composer of Respighi's calibre – although still very young – had devoted time and effort to composing a score for the guitar, that alone from an historical perspective constituted an acknowledgement of a theory backed by so much additional evidence: in Italy the renaissance of the guitar went hand in hand with the enrichment of its musical mainstream, so much so that Respighi had developed a passion for ancient tablatures from Luigi Torchi, his composition teacher, who entertained musicological interests in ancient Italian music and had exchanged correspondence on that subject with Oscar Chilesotti.

Mr. and Mrs. Respighi-Olivieri Sangiacomo met Segovia in Rome in 1927. They became close friends and we know that when in Rome Segovia was at times their guest. It seems utterly impossible to me that the great guitarist should not have asked Respighi to compose for the guitar. He most certainly must have. What I do not think likely instead is that Respighi would have disclosed to him that some twenty years before, when he still lived in Bologna,

had handed to Luigi Mozzani a not entirely finished piece for guitar, only to see it fall into permanent oblivion. It is quite obvious Respighi did not dare hope Segovia would unearth what Mozzani had buried.

Meantime the composer had sublimated his passion for guitar and lute by composing the *Antiche arie e danze per liuto* ("Ancient airs and dances for the lute"). And, besides, Respighi could hardly ignore the fact that Segovia, although a close friend of his, did not like his music. Composing anything for him would require Respighi to change his style. Theirs was a parlour friendship, without any musical offspring.

After Respighi's death, his widow resumed her old passion for composition and – among the scores she wrote – here are these "*Two Italian songs*". Olivieri Sangiacomo was no guitarist, but possessed nonetheless a subtle and most refined feeling for this instrument. Her score dates back to 1948. Much like her dead husband's attempt at capturing Mozzani's attention, so hers too towards Segovia met with no success. But Segovia kept the manuscript, together with many others, and bequeathed it to us. It stands well side by side with Frazzi's and Desderi's works, albeit as a miniature, rather than a full size composition. It reminds us of one of the delightful diptychs by Federico Mompou, entitled *Canción y danza*.

Along with a facsimile reproduction of the manuscript, this edition also contains a performing version ready for the music stand. I edited it preserving the original keys and this led me to adopt an unusual tuning. It is useful, it seconds perfectly the smooth flow and sound of this piece, and it is by no means difficult to implement.

May I express with thankfulness to professor Pedarra for his kind cooperation.

Angelo Gilardino

Vercelli, May 2005.

A Andrés Segovia

Due canzoni italiane

per chitarra

Edited by Angelo Gilardino
and Luigi Biscaldi

ELSA OLIVIERI SANGIACOMO
(1894-1996)

5th=G

Molto lento

The musical score is written for guitar in 3/4 time, key of D major (one sharp). It is marked "Molto lento". The score is divided into five systems, each starting with a measure number (8, 5, 9, 13, 17). The first system (measures 8-12) is marked *p* and *espressivo*. The second system (measures 13-16) is marked *mf*. The third system (measures 17-20) is marked *mp*. The score includes various fingerings (1-4, 0), slurs, and technical markings: "CV" (Capo Vertice) at measures 13 and 17, and "CIII" (Capo III) at measures 19 and 20. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a *mp* marking.

CV₁

21

25

sentito

CXII

29

pp

CIII

CV₁ CIII

33

Allegretto ♩ = 112

CIII

37

mf

CVII

41

45

più f

57

②

①

⑤

69

72

CIV

mf *crescendo*

76

CVII

80

CIV

crescendo sempre

84

CIV CII CIX

f *ff* *ritenuto*

58
Pavane
Pavane
Vix

Due canzoni italiane

per
chitarra

A Andre's Segovia

Elisabivieri Sangiacco
(1948)

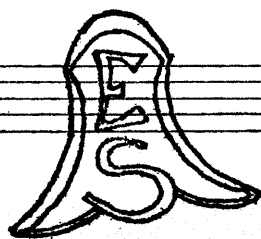
Molto lento

(suoni reali)

Chit. *express.*

Chit.

Chit.
Chit.



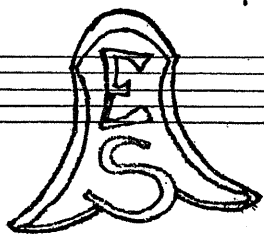
Emilia Segovia

Handwritten musical notation for the first system, featuring a treble and bass staff with various notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf* and *pp*. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Handwritten musical notation for the second system, continuing the piece with similar notation and dynamics.

Handwritten musical notation for the third system, showing further development of the musical themes.

Handwritten musical notation for the fourth system, which includes the instruction *sento to* above the staff.



Exercice Sogno

Chit

Handwritten musical notation for the first system, featuring a treble and bass staff with various notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p' and 'pp'.

Chit

Handwritten musical notation for the second system, which is crossed out with a large X.

Chit

Allegretto

Handwritten musical notation for the third system, including a tempo marking 'Allegretto' and dynamic markings 'p' and 'mf'.

Chit

Handwritten musical notation for the fourth system, featuring a treble and bass staff with various notes and rests.



Exercitia Segue

Chit

p

Chit

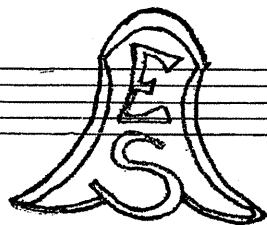
p

Chit

p

Chit

p



Exercício Segundo

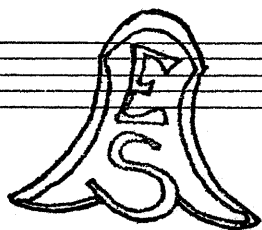
Chorus

(G)T

Chorus

Chorus

Chorus



Exercice Segond

Al tempo

hrt

mf

hrt

crescendo

hrt

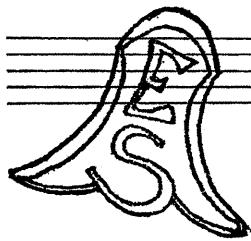
crescendo

hrt

f

ff

crescendo



Emilia Sagodes

Roma Dic. 1948